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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

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Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA)
Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, San Jose, Costa Rica

DISASTER RESPONSE

USAID/OFDA Assists Countries Affected by Tropical Storm Agatha

In late May and early June, USAID/OFDA provided humanitarian assistance to Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras after heavy rainfall from Tropical Storm Agatha caused floods and mudslides that displaced nearly 200,000 people, caused more than 200 deaths, and damaged infrastructure across the region.

GUATEMALA

In Guatemala, floods and mudslides displaced more than 162,000 people and caused 174 deaths, with another 113 reported missing as of June 8.

Starting on May 26, Guatemala was also affected by the eruption of Pacaya Volcano, located south of the nation's capital. The volcanic activity displaced more than 1,600 people, covered Guatemala City with a thick layer of ash, and prompted closure of the international airport for nearly one week.

In response to the effects of the dual disasters, USAID/OFDA provided more than \$155,000 in humanitarian assistance to Guatemala. These funds were used for the local purchase and distribution of emergency relief supplies, including transitional shelter materials, to affected populations.

USAID/OFDA also deployed a nine-person assessment team, led by USAID/

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Photo by Francisco Linares, USAID/OFDA

Emergency officials in El Salvador receive USAID/OFDA-donated mattresses and blankets to benefit residents affected by floods and mudslides in late May and early June. The emergency relief supplies were purchased locally with USAID/OFDA funds.

DISASTER RESPONSE PREPAREDNESS

Participants in the USAID/OFDA-supported ICS Forum Share Experiences



Photo by Rosa C. Hurtado de Mendoza for USAID/OFDA

Emergency officials representing 10 countries participated in the recent ICS implementation forum.

Emergency officials from countries throughout Latin America that are adopting the USAID/OFDA-supported Incident Command System (ICS) recently gathered in Guayaquil, Ecuador, to exchange experiences in ICS implementation. The ICS is designed to improve emergency responses particularly when multiple agencies such as police, firefighters, and medical staff are involved.

The USAID/OFDA Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP) is working with 16 countries in the region to implement the ICS system, including training key personnel and helping develop procedures and operations manuals.

More than 100 emergency workers from Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and the United States participated in the forum, held from June 10 to 11. Attendees discussed challenges and successes in implementing the ICS, technology, and using the ICS in emergency operations centers and in private enterprise.

USAID/OFDA, the Ecuador National Risk Management Secretariat, and the City of Guayaquil sponsored the forum.

The Guayaquil Mayor's Office broadcast the forum over the Internet; the program web page received more than 1,850 views.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Disaster Assistance Program Holds Annual Planning Meeting

USAID/OFDA staff from Washington, D.C. and the LAC regional office, as well as RDAP staff and consultants, met in Miami, Florida, from May 24 to 28, to review recent program accomplishments and plan RDAP strategies and activities for the upcoming year. Participants evaluated recent disaster responses in the region, including responses to the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, and discussed efforts to strengthen disaster risk reduction activities and urban search and rescue capabilities in the region. They also discussed efforts to improve coordination between USAID/OFDA and national disaster organizations, local partners, and private businesses.

Helping Countries Affected by Agatha

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OFDA Regional Advisor Sidney Velado, to coordinate the U.S. Government response with the Government of Guatemala (GoG).

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) deployed a team from U.S. Southern Command and a helicopter detachment from Joint Task Force-Bravo to assist with emergency response operations. From June 2 to 6, DoD helicopters transported life-saving emergency supplies to 14 isolated communities.

Tropical Storm Agatha destroyed more than 20 major bridges and nearly 100 secondary bridges, as well as approximately 500 schools, dozens of highways, water systems, and local roads.

One of the biggest challenges ahead will be the provision of transitional shelter to displaced populations, according to the USAID/OFDA team. As of June 9, Tropical Storm Agatha had lightly damaged at least 18,700 houses, moderately damaged approximately 10,600 houses, and severely damaged more than 9,800 others, according to U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports.

USAID/OFDA plans to support the construction of transitional shelters made with local materials, and related water and sanitation projects. The team also coordinated with USAID/Guatemala to develop a joint strategy to ensure that USAID/OFDA resources provided for the emergency will complement ongoing USAID programs.

EL SALVADOR

Heavy rains associated with Tropical Storm Agatha caused floods and mudslides that affected all 14 departments of El Salvador, displaced more than 11,600 people, and caused 12 deaths, with 3 others reported missing as of June 1.

In response, USAID/OFDA provided \$150,000 through USAID/El Salvador for the local purchase and distribution of emergency relief supplies including fuel to support Government of El Salvador (GoES) relief efforts and shelter supplies such as hygiene kits, blankets, and mattresses.

A three-person USAID/OFDA assessment team, headed by El Salvador-based disaster management specialist Sergio David Gutiérrez, coordinated closely with GoES Civil Protection, humanitarian groups, and municipal leaders in affected areas.

HONDURAS

Heavy rains associated with Tropical Storm Agatha caused extensive flooding in Honduras, particularly affecting Choluteca, Valle, Cortés, and Francisco Morazán departments. The floods displaced nearly 23,800 people and caused 20 deaths, with 1 reported missing, as of June 6.

In response, USAID/OFDA provided \$50,000 to non-governmental organization World Vision for the local purchase of emergency relief supplies, including hygiene items, blankets and shelter materials, for displaced populations.

USAID/OFDA also provided an additional \$25,000 to World Vision and \$25,000 to USAID/Honduras for the pre-positioning of emergency relief supplies in order to rapidly respond to any sudden-onset disaster during the 2010 hurricane season.

COMING UP

Joint Humanitarian Operations Course

USAID/OFDA Military Liaison Officer Kate Legates is organizing two upcoming Joint Humanitarian Operations Courses (JHOCs) at U.S. Southern Command in Miami, Florida. The JHOC is a two-day course that provides military staff with information about USAID and facilitates improved coordination during joint humanitarian operations. The upcoming JHOCs are scheduled to take place from June 28 to 29 and from July 6 to 7.



Photo by Ana M. Cea, USAID/OFDA

USAID/OFDA works with the U.S. military to deliver emergency relief supplies to communities in El Salvador affected by floods in late 2009.

Shelter Management Course Training

For the first time, the RDAP will train instructors in Barbados to provide the USAID/OFDA-designed Shelters and Shelter Management (SSM) course. The course provides participants with the necessary knowledge and skills to perform the duties required to manage emergency shelters. The SSM course instructor training is scheduled to take place in Bridgetown from June 28 to 30.

USAID/OFDA Protection Workshop

USAID/OFDA is hosting a regional Humanitarian Protection Workshop in San Jose, Costa Rica, from July 13 to 14. The workshop will help participants define protection, learn key principles, discuss USAID/OFDA's approach to protection programming, and present practical assessment and other tools for mainstreaming protection activities. A second regional workshop, focusing on USAID/OFDA's strategy for protecting and restoring livelihoods, is planned for August.

Community-Based Early Warning Systems

USAID/OFDA disaster risk management specialist Dante Torres will participate in the July 20 meeting on community-based early warning systems for floods, mudslides, and other adverse effects of the El Niño Southern Oscillation weather phenomenon in Peru. The meeting, in Huancayo, Junin Region, is organized by the National Civil Defense Institution, INDECI.

INSARAG Advisory Committee Meeting

USAID/OFDA is supporting an upcoming meeting of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) Americas Region. Members of the INSARAG Americas Advisory Committee will meet in Bogotá, Colombia, from August 17 to 19 to finalize plans for the INSARAG Regional Earthquake Simulation Exercise to take place in Bogotá in mid-November. Urban search and rescue teams from throughout the continent and from other INSARAG regions will be invited to participate in and observe the simulation exercise, respectively.

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